

Claims:

- 1 1. A process for selectively extracting metal values from a starting material which  
2 includes one or more solubilizable metal values, the process comprising:  
3       separating and removing fluorine values from the starting material;  
4       leaching the remaining material to solubilize metal values contained in the  
5 remaining material and generate an aqueous solution comprising said solubilized  
6 metal values; and  
7       extracting a solubilized metal value from said aqueous solution.
- 1 2. The process of claim 1 wherein the step of separating and removing fluorine  
2 values comprises:  
3       reacting the starting material with a solution of a mineral acid for a period  
4 of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to solubilize at  
5 least a portion of tantalum and niobium from the starting material;  
6       separating and drying the undissolved material;  
7       reacting the undissolved material with mineral acid comprising sulfuric acid  
8 for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to  
9 liberate hydrogen fluoride gas and to generate a sulfated material.
- 1 3. The process of claim 2 wherein the step of leaching the undissolved material to  
2 solubilize metal values contained in the undissolved material and generate an  
3 aqueous solution comprising said solubilized metal values comprises:  
4       reacting the sulfated material with water for a period of time, and under  
5 temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to generate said aqueous solution  
6 comprising solubilized metal values;  
7       filtering said aqueous solution to separate remaining material solids from  
8 said aqueous solution.
- 1 4. The process of claim 3 wherein the aqueous solution includes zirconium and  
2 uranium and the step of extracting a solubilized metal value from said aqueous  
3 solution comprises extracting zirconium and uranium metal values by a process  
4 comprising:  
5       contacting said aqueous solution with an organic medium which includes a  
6 diluent and an extractant, said diluent being immiscible with said aqueous solution  
7 thereby producing an organic phase comprising zirconium and uranium and an  
8 aqueous raffinate phase;  
9       separating said organic phase from said raffinate phase;  
10       stripping zirconium from said organic phase by contacting said organic

11 phase with a zirconium stripping agent, the zirconium stripping forming an  
12 aqueous phase comprising zirconium and a resultant organic phase comprising  
13 uranium; and  
14 stripping uranium from said resultant organic phase by contacting said  
15 resultant organic phase with a uranium stripping agent, the uranium stripping  
16 forming an aqueous phase comprising uranium and a final organic phase  
17 comprising said diluent and said extractant.

1 5. The process of claim 4 wherein the aqueous solution includes uranium,  
2 zirconium, thorium and scandium and the process further comprises extracting  
3 thorium and scandium metal values from said raffinate formed by said contact  
4 between said aqueous solution and said organic medium, by a process comprising:  
5 contacting said raffinate with another organic medium which includes a  
6 diluent and an extractant, said diluent being immiscible with said aqueous solution,  
7 thereby producing an organic phase comprising thorium and scandium and an  
8 another aqueous raffinate phase;  
9 separating said organic phase from said another raffinate phase;  
10 stripping thorium from said organic phase by contacting said organic phase  
11 with a thorium stripping agent, said thorium stripping forming an aqueous phase  
12 comprising thorium and a resultant organic phase comprising scandium; and  
13 stripping scandium from said resultant organic phase by contacting said  
14 resultant organic phase with a scandium stripping agent, said scandium stripping  
15 forming a phase comprising scandium from said resultant organic phase and an  
16 aqueous phase comprising said scandium stripping agent and a final organic  
17 phase.

1 6. The process of claim 4 wherein said organic medium further comprises a  
2 modifier.

1 7. The process of claim 5 wherein said another organic medium further comprises  
2 a modifier.

1 8. A process for selectively extracting zirconium, uranium, thorium and scandium  
2 metal values from a starting material which includes the metal values comprising:  
3 reacting a starting material with a solution of a mineral acid for a period of  
4 time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to solubilize  
5 tantalum and niobium into solution and thereby generate a solution comprising  
6 tantalum and niobium, and a remaining material;

7            separating and drying the remaining material;  
8            reacting the remaining material with mineral acid for a period of time, and  
9            under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to liberate hydrogen fluoride  
10           gas and to generate a sulfated material;  
11            reacting (leaching) the sulfated material with water for a period of time, and  
12            under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to generate an aqueous  
13            solution of the metal values;  
14            filtering said aqueous solution to separate remaining material solids from  
15            the aqueous solution;  
16            contacting said aqueous solution with an organic medium which includes a  
17            diluent and an extractant, and preferably further includes a modifier, said diluent  
18            being immiscible with said aqueous solution thereby producing an organic phase  
19            comprising zirconium and uranium and an aqueous raffinate phase depleted in  
20            zirconium and uranium;  
21            separating said organic phase from said raffinate phase;  
22            stripping zirconium from said organic phase by contacting said organic  
23            phase with a zirconium stripping agent, said stripping forming a zirconium  
24            aqueous phase comprising zirconium from said organic phase and a resultant  
25            organic phase comprising uranium, said diluent and said extractant; and  
26            stripping uranium from said resultant organic phase by contacting said  
27            resultant organic phase with a uranium stripping agent, said stripping forming a  
28            uranium aqueous phase comprising uranium from said resultant organic phase and  
29            a final organic phase comprising said diluent and said extractant.  
30            contacting said raffinate with another organic medium which includes a  
31            diluent and an extractant, and preferably further includes a modifier, said diluent  
32            being immiscible with said raffinate, thereby producing an organic phase  
33            comprising thorium and scandium and an another raffinate phase depleted in  
34            thorium and scandium;  
35            separating said organic phase from said raffinate phase;  
36            stripping thorium from said organic phase by contacting said organic phase  
37            with a thorium stripping agent, said stripping forming a thorium aqueous phase  
38            comprising thorium from said organic phase and another resultant organic phase  
39            comprising scandium, said diluent and said extractant; and  
40            stripping scandium from said another resultant organic phase by contacting  
41            said resultant organic phase with a scandium stripping agent, said stripping  
42            forming a scandium phase comprising scandium from said resultant organic phase,  
43            an aqueous phase comprising said scandium stripping agent and another final  
44            organic phase comprising said diluent and said extractant.

1 9. A process for selectively extracting zirconium, uranium, thorium and scandium  
2 metal values from a sulfated starting material which includes the metal values  
3 comprising:  
4       reacting (leaching) the starting sulfated material with water for a period of  
5 time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to generate an  
6 aqueous solution of the metal values;  
7       filtering said aqueous solution to separate remaining material solids from  
8 the aqueous solution;  
9       contacting said aqueous solution with an organic medium which includes a  
10 diluent and an extractant, and preferably further includes a modifier, said diluent  
11 being immiscible with said aqueous solution thereby producing an organic phase  
12 comprising zirconium and uranium and an aqueous raffinate phase depleted in  
13 zirconium and uranium;  
14       separating said organic phase from said raffinate phase;  
15       stripping zirconium from said organic phase by contacting said organic  
16 phase with a zirconium stripping agent, said stripping forming a zirconium  
17 aqueous phase comprising zirconium from said organic phase and a resultant  
18 organic phase comprising uranium, said diluent and said extractant; and  
19       stripping uranium from said resultant organic phase by contacting said  
20 resultant organic phase with a uranium stripping agent, said stripping forming a  
21 uranium aqueous phase comprising uranium from said resultant organic phase and  
22 a final organic phase comprising said diluent and said extractant.  
23       contacting said raffinate with another organic medium which includes a  
24 diluent and an extractant, and preferably further includes a modifier, said diluent  
25 being immiscible with said raffinate, thereby producing an organic phase  
26 comprising thorium and scandium and an another raffinate phase depleted in  
27 thorium and scandium;  
28       separating said organic phase from said raffinate phase;  
29       stripping thorium from said organic phase by contacting said organic phase  
30 with a thorium stripping agent, said stripping forming a thorium aqueous phase  
31 comprising thorium from said organic phase and another resultant organic phase  
32 comprising scandium, said diluent and said extractant; and  
33       stripping scandium from said another resultant organic phase by contacting  
34 said resultant organic phase with a scandium stripping agent, said stripping  
35 forming a scandium phase comprising scandium from said resultant organic phase,  
36 an aqueous phase comprising said scandium stripping agent and another final  
37 organic phase comprising said diluent and said extractant.

selectively extracting a solubilized metal value from said aqueous solution.

2. (Once Amended) The process of claim 1 wherein the one or more solubilizable metal values include tantalum and niobium and the step of separating and removing fluorine values further comprises:

reacting the source [starting] material with a solution of a mineral acid for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient, to solubilize at least a portion of tantalum and niobium from the source [starting] material and create a solution comprising tantalum and niobium metal values and undissolved material;

separating and drying the undissolved material;

reacting the undissolved material with a mineral acid comprising sulfuric acid for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to liberate hydrogen fluoride gas and to generate a sulfated material comprising the one or more other solubilizable metal value(s) and at least partially depleted in fluorine metal values; and

leaching the sulfated material to solubilize the one or more other metal values contained in the sulfated material and generate said aqueous solution comprising the solubilizable metal value(s) and a solid phase at least partially depleted in the solubilizable metal value(s).

3. (Once amended) The process of claim <sup>2</sup>/<sub>A</sub> wherein the step of leaching the sulfated [undissolved] material [to solubilize metal values contained in the <sup>sulfated</sup>/<sub>A</sub> undissolved material and generate an aqueous solution comprising said solubilized metal values] comprises:

reacting the sulfated material with water for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to generate said aqueous solution comprising the one or more other solubilized metal values; and

filtering said aqueous solution comprising the one or more other solubilized metal values to separate remaining material solids from said aqueous solution.

4. (Once Amended) The process of claim 3 wherein the one or more other solubilizable metal values in the aqueous solution include[s] zirconium and uranium metal values, and the process further includes [step of extracting a solubilized metal value from said aqueous solution comprises] extracting zirconium and uranium metal values by a process comprising:

contacting said aqueous solution with an organic medium which includes a diluent and an extractant, said diluent being immiscible with said aqueous solution thereby producing an organic phase comprising zirconium and uranium metal values and an aqueous raffinate phase at least partially depleted in zirconium and uranium metal values;

separating said organic phase from said raffinate phase;

stripping zirconium from said organic phase by contacting said organic phase with a zirconium stripping agent, the zirconium stripping forming an aqueous phase comprising zirconium and a resultant organic phase comprising uranium; and

stripping uranium from said resultant organic phase by contacting said resultant organic phase with a uranium stripping agent, the uranium stripping forming an aqueous phase comprising uranium and a final organic phase comprising said diluent and said extractant.

5. (Once amended) The process of claim 4 wherein the one or more other solubilizable metal values in the aqueous solution further includes uranium, zirconium, thorium and scandium metal values and the process further comprises extracting thorium and scandium metal values from said raffinate phase at least partially depleted in zirconium and uranium metal values formed by said contact between said aqueous solution and said organic medium, by a process comprising:

contacting said raffinate phase with another organic medium which includes a diluent and an extractant, said diluent being immiscible with said aqueous solution, thereby producing an organic phase comprising thorium and scandium metal values and an another aqueous raffinate phase at least partially depleted in thorium and scandium metal values;

separating said organic phase from said another raffinate phase;

stripping thorium from said organic phase by contacting said organic phase with a thorium stripping agent, said thorium stripping forming an aqueous phase comprising thorium and a resultant organic phase comprising scandium; and

stripping scandium from said resultant organic phase by contacting said resultant organic phase with a scandium stripping agent, said scandium stripping forming a phase comprising scandium from said resultant organic phase and an aqueous phase comprising said scandium stripping agent and a final organic phase.

8. (Once Amended) A process for selectively extracting zirconium, uranium, thorium and scandium metal values from a source [starting] material comprising zirconium, uranium,

thorium, scandium, fluorine, tantalum and/or niobium [which includes the] metal values the  
process comprising:

reacting the source [a starting] material with a solution of a mineral acid for a period of  
time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to solubilize tantalum and  
niobium into solution and thereby generate a solution comprising tantalum and/or niobium metal  
values, and a remaining material at least partially depleted in tantalum and/or niobium and  
comprising fluorine, zirconium, uranium, thorium and/or scandium metal values;

separating and drying the remaining material;

reacting the remaining material with mineral acid for a period of time, and under  
temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to liberate hydrogen fluoride gas and to generate a  
sulfated material at least partially depleted in fluorine metal values and comprising zirconium,  
uranium, thorium and/or scandium metal values;

reacting (leaching) the sulfated material with water for a period of time, and under  
temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to generate an aqueous solution comprising  
zirconium, uranium, thorium and/or scandium [of the] metal values;

filtering said aqueous solution comprising zirconium, uranium, thorium and/or scandium  
metal values to separate remaining material solids from the aqueous solution;

contacting said aqueous solution comprising zirconium, uranium, thorium and/or  
scandium metal values with an organic medium which includes a diluent and an extractant [, and  
preferably further includes a modifier,] said diluent being immiscible with said aqueous solution  
thereby producing an organic phase comprising zirconium and/or uranium metal values and an

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aqueous raffinate phase at least partially depleted in zirconium and uranium metal values and comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values;

separating said organic phase comprising zirconium and/or uranium metal values from said raffinate phase at least partially depleted in zirconium and/or uranium metal values and comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values;

stripping zirconium from said organic phase comprising zirconium and/or uranium metal values by contacting said organic phase with a zirconium stripping agent, said stripping forming a zirconium aqueous phase comprising zirconium metal values from said organic phase and at least partially depleted in uranium metal values and a resultant organic phase comprising uranium, said diluent and said extractant; and

stripping uranium from said resultant organic phase by contacting said resultant organic phase with a uranium stripping agent, said stripping forming a uranium aqueous phase comprising uranium from said resultant organic phase and a final organic phase comprising said diluent and said extractant.

contacting said raffinate phase at least partially depleted in zirconium and/or uranium metal values and comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values with another organic medium which includes a diluent and an extractant, [and preferably further includes a modifier,] said diluent being immiscible with said raffinate, thereby producing an organic phase comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values and an another raffinate phase at least partially depleted in thorium and/or scandium metal values;

separating said organic phase comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values from said raffinate phase at least partially depleted in thorium and/or scandium metal values;

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stripping thorium from said organic phase comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values by contacting said organic phase with a thorium stripping agent, said stripping forming a thorium aqueous phase comprising thorium metal values from said organic phase and at least partially depleted in scandium metal values and another resultant organic phase comprising scandium metal values, said diluent and said extractant; and

stripping scandium metal values from said another resultant organic phase by contacting said resultant organic phase with a scandium stripping agent, said stripping forming a scandium phase comprising scandium from said resultant organic phase, an aqueous phase comprising said scandium stripping agent and another final organic phase comprising said diluent and said extractant.

9. (Once Amended) A process for selectively extracting zirconium, uranium, thorium and scandium metal values from a sulfated starting material which includes the metal values comprising:

reacting [(leaching)] the sulfated material with water for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to generate an aqueous solution comprising zirconium, uranium, thorium and/or scandium [of the] metal values;

filtering said aqueous solution comprising zirconium, uranium, thorium and/or scandium metal values to separate remaining material solids from the aqueous solution;

contacting said aqueous solution comprising zirconium, uranium, thorium and/or scandium metal values with an organic medium which includes a diluent and an extractant [, and preferably further includes a modifier,] said diluent being immiscible with said aqueous solution

thereby producing an organic phase comprising zirconium and/or uranium metal values and an aqueous raffinate phase at least partially depleted in zirconium and uranium metal values and comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values;

separating said organic phase comprising zirconium and/or uranium metal values from said raffinate phase at least partially depleted in zirconium and/or uranium metal values and comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values;

stripping zirconium from said organic phase comprising zirconium and/or uranium metal values by contacting said organic phase with a zirconium stripping agent, said stripping forming a zirconium aqueous phase comprising zirconium metal values from said organic phase and at least partially depleted in uranium metal values and a resultant organic phase comprising uranium, said diluent and said extractant; and

stripping uranium from said resultant organic phase by contacting said resultant organic phase with a uranium stripping agent, said stripping forming a uranium aqueous phase comprising uranium from said resultant organic phase and a final organic phase comprising said diluent and said extractant.

contacting said raffinate phase at least partially depleted in zirconium and/or uranium metal values and comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values with another organic medium which includes a diluent and an extractant, [and preferably further includes a modifier,] said diluent being immiscible with said raffinate, thereby producing an organic phase comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values and an another raffinate phase at least partially depleted in thorium and/or scandium metal values;

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separating said organic phase comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values from said raffinate phase at least partially depleted in thorium and/or scandium metal values;

stripping thorium from said organic phase comprising thorium and/or scandium metal values by contacting said organic phase with a thorium stripping agent, said stripping forming a thorium aqueous phase comprising thorium metal values from said organic phase and at least partially depleted in scandium metal values and another resultant organic phase comprising scandium metal values, said diluent and said extractant; and

stripping scandium metal values from said another resultant organic phase by contacting said resultant organic phase with a scandium stripping agent, said stripping forming a scandium phase comprising scandium from said resultant organic phase, an aqueous phase comprising said scandium stripping agent and another final organic phase comprising said diluent and said extractant.

In addition please add the following new claims 10-15.

10. (New) A process for selectively extracting a scandium metal value from a source material which includes solubilizable scandium metal values, the process comprising:

leaching the source material to solubilize scandium metal values contained in the source material and generate an aqueous solution comprising said solubilized scandium metal values and a solid phase at least partially depleted in scandium; and

selectively extracting a scandium metal value from said aqueous solution.

11. (New) The process of claim 10 wherein the source material further comprises fluorine, tantalum and/or niobium and the process further comprises:

reacting the source material with a solution of a mineral acid for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient, to solubilize at least a portion of tantalum and niobium from the starting material and create a solution comprising tantalum and niobium metal values and a solids residue comprising fluorine and scandium metal values, and at least partially depleted in tantalum and niobium metal values;

separating and drying the solids residue

reacting the solids residue with a mineral acid comprising sulfuric acid for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient, to liberate hydrogen fluoride gas and to generate a sulfated material comprising scandium metal values and at least partially depleted in fluorine metal values; and

leaching the sulfated material to solubilize scandium metal values contained in the sulfated material and generate said aqueous solution comprising scandium metal values and a solid phase at least partially depleted in scandium.

12. (New) The process of claim 11 wherein the step of leaching the sulfated material comprises:

reacting the sulfated material with water for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to generate said aqueous solution comprising solubilized scandium metal values; and

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filtering said aqueous solution comprising solubilized scandium metal values to separate remaining material solids from said aqueous solution.

13. (New) The process of claim 12 wherein the step of selectively extracting a scandium metal value from said aqueous solution comprising solubilized scandium metal values comprises:

contacting said aqueous solution comprising solubilized scandium metal values with an organic medium which includes a diluent and an extractant, said diluent being immiscible with said aqueous solution, thereby producing an organic phase comprising scandium metal values and an aqueous raffinate phase at least partially depleted in scandium metal values;

separating said organic phase from said raffinate phase;

stripping scandium from said organic phase by contacting said organic phase with a scandium stripping agent, said scandium stripping forming a phase comprising scandium from said resultant organic phase and an aqueous phase comprising said scandium stripping agent and a final organic phase.

14. (New) A process for selectively extracting scandium metal values from a source material comprising scandium, fluorine, tantalum and/or niobium metal values the process comprising:

reacting the source material with a solution of a mineral acid for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to solubilize tantalum and niobium into solution and thereby generate a solution comprising tantalum and/or niobium metal values, and a

remaining material at least partially depleted in tantalum and/or niobium and comprising fluorine and/or scandium metal values;

separating and drying the remaining material;

reacting the remaining material with mineral acid for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to liberate hydrogen fluoride gas and to generate a sulfated material at least partially depleted in fluorine metal values and comprising scandium metal values;

reacting the sulfated material with water for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to generate an aqueous solution scandium metal values;

filtering said aqueous solution comprising scandium metal values to separate remaining material solids from the aqueous solution;

contacting said aqueous solution comprising solubilized scandium metal values with an organic medium which includes a diluent and an extractant, said diluent being immiscible with said aqueous solution, thereby producing an organic phase comprising scandium metal values and an aqueous raffinate phase at least partially depleted in scandium metal values;

separating said organic phase comprising scandium metal values from said raffinate phase at least partially depleted in scandium metal values;

stripping scandium metal values from said organic phase by contacting said resultant organic phase with a scandium stripping agent, said stripping forming a scandium phase comprising scandium metal values from said organic phase, an aqueous phase comprising said scandium stripping agent and a final organic phase comprising said diluent and said extractant.

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15. (New) A process for selectively extracting scandium metal values from a sulfated starting material which includes the metal values comprising:

reacting the sulfated material with water for a period of time, and under temperature and pressure conditions sufficient to generate an aqueous solution comprising scandium metal values;

filtering said aqueous solution comprising scandium metal values to separate remaining material solids from the aqueous solution;

contacting said aqueous solution comprising solubilized scandium metal values with an organic medium which includes a diluent and an extractant, said diluent being immiscible with said aqueous solution, thereby producing an organic phase comprising scandium metal values and an aqueous raffinate phase at least partially depleted in scandium metal values;

separating said organic phase comprising scandium metal values from said raffinate phase at least partially depleted scandium metal values;

stripping scandium metal values from said organic phase by contacting said resultant organic phase with a scandium stripping agent, said stripping forming a scandium phase comprising scandium metal values from said organic phase, an aqueous phase comprising said scandium stripping agent and a final organic phase comprising said diluent and said extractant.

The following remarks are submitted in response to the Office Action mailed May 28,

1997.